

108

# Greatest Of All Times

*globally selected  
PERSONALITIES*

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23 Mar 1910 <::><::><::> 6 Sep 1998



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6 Sep 1998

*Asian of the Century*

## Filmmaking Technique of

# Akira Kurosawa

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filmmaking\\_technique\\_of\\_Akira\\_Kurosawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filmmaking_technique_of_Akira_Kurosawa)

The legacy of filmmaking technique left by [Akira Kurosawa](#) (1910–1998) for subsequent generations of filmmakers has been diverse and of international influence beyond his native Japan. The legacy of influence has ranged from working methods, influence on style, and selection and adaptation of themes in cinema. Kurosawa's working method was oriented toward extensive involvement with numerous aspects of film production. He was also an effective screenwriter who would work in close contact with his writers very early in the production cycle to ensure high quality in the scripts which would be used for his films.

Kurosawa's aesthetic visual sense meant that his attention to cinematography and filming was also demanding and often went beyond the attention which directors would normally expect to use with their cameramen. His reputation as an editor of his own films was consistent throughout his lifetime in his insisting on close participation with any other editors involved in the editing of his films. Throughout his career, Kurosawa worked constantly with people drawn from the same pool of creative technicians, crew members and actors, popularly known as the "Kurosawa-gumi" ([Japanese](#): 黒澤組, 'Kurosawa group').

The style associated with Kurosawa's films is marked by a number of innovations which Kurosawa introduced in his films over the decades. In his films of the 1940s and 1950s, Kurosawa introduced innovative uses of the [axial cut](#) and the [screen wipe](#) which became part of the standard repertoire of filmmaking for subsequent generations of filmmakers. Kurosawa, and his emphasis on sound-image counterpoint, by all accounts always gave great attention to the soundtracks of his films and he was

involved with several of Japan's outstanding composers of his generation including [Toru Takemitsu](#).

There are four themes which can be associated with Kurosawa's filmmaking technique which recur from his early films to the films he made at the end of his career. These include his interest in (a) the master-disciple relationship, (b) the heroic champion, (c) the close examination of nature and human nature, and (d) the cycles of violence. Regarding Kurosawa's reflections on the theme of cycles of violence, these found a beginning with [Throne of Blood](#) (1957), and became nearly an obsession with historical cycles of inexorable savage violence—what [Stephen Prince](#) calls "the countertradition to the committed, heroic mode of Kurosawa's cinema"<sup>[3]</sup> which Kurosawa would sustain as a thematic interest even toward the end of his career in his last films.

### Working methods

All biographical sources, as well as the filmmaker's own comments, indicate that [Akira Kurosawa](#) was a completely "hands-on" director, passionately involved in every aspect of the filmmaking process. As one interviewer summarized, "he (co-)writes his scripts, oversees the design, rehearses the actors, sets up all the shots and then does the editing." His active participation extended from the initial concept to the editing and scoring of the final product.

### Script

Kurosawa emphasized time and again that the screenplay was the absolute foundation of a successful film and that, though a mediocre director can sometimes make a passable film out of a *good* script, even an excellent director can never make a good film out of a *bad* script. During the postwar period, he began the practice of collaborating with a rotating group of five screenwriters: Eijirō Hisaita, Ryuzo Kikushima, [Shinobu Hashimoto](#), Hideo Oguni, and Masato Ide. Whichever members of this group happened to be working on a particular film would gather around a table, often at a hot-springs resort, where they would not be distracted by the outside world. ([Seven Samurai](#), for example, was written in this fashion.) Often they all (except Oguni, who acted as "referee") would work on exactly the same pages of the script, and Kurosawa would choose the best-written version from the different drafts of each particular scene. This method was adopted "so that each contributor might function as a kind of foil, checking the dominance of any one person's point-of-view."

In addition to the actual script, Kurosawa at this stage often produced extensive, fantastically detailed notes to elaborate his vision. For example, for *Seven Samurai*, he created six notebooks with (among many other things) detailed biographies of the samurai, including what they wore and ate, how they walked, talked and behaved when greeted, and even how each tied his shoes. For the 101 peasant characters in the film, he created a registry consisting of 23 families and instructed the performers playing these roles to live and work as these "families" for the duration of shooting.

## Shooting



Filming of *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail*, 1945

For his early films, although they were consistently well photographed, Kurosawa generally used standard lenses and deep-focus photography. Beginning with *Seven Samurai* (1954), however, Kurosawa's cinematic technique changed drastically with his extensive use of [long lens](#) and multiple cameras. The director claimed that he used these lenses and several cameras rolling at once to help the actors—allowing them to be photographed at some distance from the lens, and without any knowledge of which particular camera's image would be utilized in the final cut—making their performances much more natural. (In fact, [Tatsuya Nakadai](#) agreed that the multiple cameras greatly helped his performances with the director.) But these changes had a powerful effect as well on the look of the action scenes in that film, particularly the final battle in the rain. Says [Stephen Prince](#): "He can use the telephoto lenses to get under the horses, in between their hooves, to plunge us into the chaos of that battle in a visual way that is really quite unprecedented, both in Kurosawa's own work and in the samurai genre as a whole."

With *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), Kurosawa began to utilize the [widescreen \(anamorphic\)](#) process for the first time in his work. These three techniques—long lenses, multiple cameras and widescreen—were in later works fully exploited, even in sequences with little or no overt action, such as the early scenes of *High and Low* that take place in the central character's home, in which they are employed to dramatize tensions and power relationships between the characters within a highly confined space.

For *Throne of Blood* (1957), in the scene where Washizu ([Toshiro Mifune](#)) is attacked with arrows by his own men, the director had archers shoot real arrows, hollowed out and running along wires, toward Mifune from a distance of about ten feet, with the actor carefully following chalk marks on the ground to avoid being hit. (Some of the arrows missed him by an inch; the actor, who admitted that he was not merely *acting* terrified in the film, suffered nightmares afterward.)

For *Red Beard* (1965), to construct the gate for the clinic set, Kurosawa had his assistants dismantle rotten wood from old sets and then create the prop from scratch with this old wood, so the gate would look properly ravaged by time. For the same



film, for teacups that appeared in the movie, his crew poured fifty years' worth of tea into the cups so they would appear appropriately stained.<sup>[20][21]</sup>

For [Ran](#) (1985), art director [Yoshirō Muraki](#), constructing the "third castle" set under the director's supervision, created the "stones" of that castle by having photographs taken of actual stones from a celebrated castle, then painting [Styrofoam](#) blocks to exactly resemble those stones and gluing them to the castle "wall" through a process known as "rough-stone piling", which required months of work. Later, before shooting the famous scene in which the castle is attacked and set on fire, in order to prevent the Styrofoam "stones" from melting in the heat, the art department coated the surface with four layers of cement, then painted the colors of the ancient stones onto the cement.

## Editing

Kurosawa both directed and edited most of his films, which is nearly unique among prominent filmmakers. Kurosawa often remarked that he shot a film simply in order to have material to edit, because the editing of a picture was the most important and creatively interesting part of the process for him. Kurosawa's creative team believed that the director's skill with editing was his greatest talent. Hiroshi Nezu, a longtime production supervisor on his films, said, "Among ourselves, we think that he is [Toho](#)'s best director, that he is Japan's best scenarist, and that he is the best editor in the world. He is most concerned with the flowing quality which a film must have ... The Kurosawa film flows *over* the cut, as it were."

The director's frequent crew member [Teruyo Nogami](#) confirms this view. "Akira Kurosawa's editing was exceptional, the inimitable work of a genius ... No one was a match for him." She claimed that Kurosawa carried in his head all the information about all shots filmed, and if, in the editing room, he asked for a piece of film and she handed him the wrong one, he would immediately recognize the error, though she had taken detailed notes on each shot and he had not. She compared his mind to a computer, which could do with edited segments of film what computers do today.

Kurosawa's habitual method was to edit a film daily, bit by bit, during production. This helped particularly when he started using multiple cameras, which resulted in a large amount of film to assemble. "I always edit in the evening if we have a fair amount of footage in the can. After watching the rushes, I usually go to the editing room and work."<sup>[27]</sup> Because of this practice of editing as he went along, the post-production period for a Kurosawa film could be startlingly brief: [Yojimbo](#) (1961) had its Japanese premiere on April 20, 1961, four days after shooting concluded on April 16.

## "Kurosawa-gumi"



**Cast and crew of *Throne of Blood* taken in 1956, showing some of the Kurosawa-gumi. (From left to right) Shinjin Akiike, Fumio Yanoguchi, Kuichiro Kishida, Samaji Nonagase, Takao Saito, Toshiro Mifune (in the jeep), Minoru Chiaki, Takashi Shimura, Teruyo Nogami (scripter), Yoshirō Muraki, Akira Kurosawa, Hiroshi Nezu, Asakazu Nakai, and Sōjirō Motoki.**

Throughout his career, Kurosawa worked constantly with people drawn from the same pool of creative technicians, crew members and actors, popularly known as the "Kurosawa-gumi" (Kurosawa group). The following is a partial list of this group, divided by profession. This information is derived from the [IMDb](#) pages for Kurosawa's films and Stuart Galbraith IV's filmography:

**Composers:** [Fumio Hayasaka](#) (*Drunken Angel*, *Stray Dog*, *Scandal*, *Rashomon*, *The Idiot*, *Ikiru*, *Seven Samurai*, *I Live in Fear*); [Masaru Sato](#) (*Throne of Blood*, *The Lower Depths*, *The Hidden Fortress*, *The Bad Sleep Well*, *Yojimbo*, *Sanjuro*, *High and Low*, *Red Beard*); [Tōru Takemitsu](#) (*Dodeskaden*, *Ran*); [Shin'ichirō Ikebe](#) (*Kagemusha*, *Dreams*, *Rhapsody in August*, *Madadayo*).

**Cinematographers:** [Asakazu Nakai](#) (*No Regrets for Our Youth*, *One Wonderful Sunday*, *Stray Dog*, *Ikiru*, *Seven Samurai*, *I Live in Fear*, *Throne of Blood*, *High and Low*, *Red Beard*, *Dersu Uzala*, *Ran*); [Kazuo Miyagawa](#) (*Rashomon*, *Yojimbo*);<sup>[note 2]</sup> [Kazuo Yamazaki](#) (*The Lower Depths*, *The Hidden Fortress*); [Takao Saito](#) (*Sanjuro*, *High and Low*, *Red Beard*, *Dodeskaden*, *Kagemusha*, *Ran*, *Dreams*, *Rhapsody in August*, *Madadayo*).

**Art Department:** [Yoshirō Muraki](#) served as either assistant art director, art director or production designer for all Kurosawa's films (except for *Dersu Uzala*) from *Drunken Angel* until the end of the director's career. The 1,400 uniforms and suits of armor used for the extras in the film *Ran* were designed by [costume designer Emi Wada](#) and Kurosawa, and were handmade by master tailors over more than two years, for which the film won its sole Academy Award.

**Production Crew:** [Teruyo Nogami](#) served as script supervisor, production manager, associate director or assistant to the producer on all of Kurosawa's films

from *Rashomon* (1950) to the end of the director's career. Hiroshi Nezu was production supervisor or unit production manager on all the films from *Seven Samurai* to *Dodeskaden*, except *Sanjuro*. After retiring as a director, [Ishirō Honda](#) returned more than 30 years later to work again for his friend and former mentor as a directorial advisor, production coordinator and creative consultant on Kurosawa's last five films (*Kagemusha*, *Ran*, *Dreams*, *Rhapsody in August* and *Madadayo*).

**Actors:** Leading actors: [Takashi Shimura](#) (21 films); [Toshiro Mifune](#) (16 films), [Susumu Fujita](#) (8 films), [Tatsuya Nakadai](#) (6 films) and [Masayuki Mori](#) (5 films). Supporting performers (in alphabetical order): [Minoru Chiaki](#), [Kamatari Fujiwara](#), [Bokuzen Hidari](#), Fumiko Homma, Hisashi Igawa, Yunosuke Ito, [Kyōko Kagawa](#), [Daisuke Katō](#), [Isao Kimura](#), Kokuten Kodo, Akitake Kono, Yoshio Kosugi, Koji Mitsui, [Seiji Miyaguchi](#), Eiko Miyoshi, [Nobuo Nakamura](#), [Akemi Negishi](#), [Denjiro Okochi](#), [Noriko Sengoku](#), Gen Shimizu, Ichiro Sugai, Haruo Tanaka, [Akira Terao](#), [Eijirō Tōno](#), [Yoshio Tsuchiya](#), Kichijiro Ueda, Atsushi Watanabe, [Isuzu Yamada](#), [Tsutomu Yamazaki](#) and Yoshitaka Zushi.

## Style

Virtually all commentators have noted Kurosawa's bold, dynamic style, which many have compared to the traditional Hollywood style of narrative moviemaking, one that emphasizes, in the words of one such scholar, "chronological, causal, linear and historical thinking". But it has also been claimed that, from his very first film, the director displayed a technique quite distinct from the seamless style of classic Hollywood. This technique involved a disruptive depiction of screen space through the use of numerous unrepeated camera setups, a disregard for the traditional 180-degree axis of action around which Hollywood scenes have usually been constructed, and an approach in which "narrative time becomes spatialized", with fluid camera movement often replacing conventional editing. The following are some idiosyncratic aspects of the artist's style.

## Axial cut

In his films of the 1940s and 1950s, Kurosawa frequently employs the "[axial cut](#)", in which the camera moves closer to, or further away from, the subject, not through the use of [tracking shots](#) or [dissolves](#), but through a series of matched [jump cuts](#). For example, in [Sanjiro Sugata Part II](#) (1945), the hero takes leave of the woman he loves, but then, after walking away a short distance, turns and bows to her, and then, after walking further, turns and bows once more. This sequence of shots is illustrated on film scholar [David Bordwell](#)'s blog. The three shots are not connected in the film by camera movements or dissolves, but by a series of two jump cuts. The effect is to stress the duration of Sanjiro's departure.

In the opening sequence of *Seven Samurai* in the peasant village, the axial cut is used twice. When the villagers are outdoors, gathered in a circle, weeping and lamenting the imminent arrival of the bandits, they are glimpsed from above in extreme long shot, then, after the cut, in a much closer shot, then in an even closer shot at ground level as the dialogue begins. A few minutes later, when the villagers go to the mill to ask the village elder's advice, there is a long shot of the mill, with a slowly turning

wheel in the river, then a closer shot of this wheel, and then a still closer shot of it. (As the mill is where the elder lives, these shots forge a mental association in the viewer's mind between that character and the mill.)

### Cutting on motion

A number of scholars have pointed out Kurosawa's tendency to "cut on motion": that is, to edit a sequence of a character or characters in motion so that an action is depicted in two or more separate shots, rather than one uninterrupted shot. One scholar, as an example, describes a tense scene in *Seven Samurai* in which the samurai Shichirōji, who is standing, wishes to console the peasant Manzo, who is sitting on the ground, and he gets down on one knee to talk to him. Kurosawa chooses to film this simple action in two shots rather than one (cutting between the two only *after* the action of kneeling has begun) to fully convey Shichirōji's humility. Numerous other instances of this device are evident in the movie. "Kurosawa [frequently] breaks up the action, fragments it, in order to create an emotional effect."

### Wipe

A form of cinematic punctuation very strongly identified with Kurosawa is the [wipe](#). This is an effect created through an [optical printer](#), in which, when a scene ends, a line or bar appears to move across the screen, "wiping" away the image while simultaneously revealing the first image of the subsequent scene. As a transitional device, it is used as a substitute for the straight cut or the [dissolve](#) (though Kurosawa, of course, often used both of those devices as well). In his mature work, Kurosawa employed the wipe so frequently that it became a kind of signature. For example, one blogger has counted no fewer than 12 instances of the wipe in [Drunken Angel](#) (1948).

There are a number of theories concerning the purpose of this device, which, as James Goodwin notes, was common in silent cinema but became considerably rarer in the more "realistic" sound cinema. Goodwin claims that the wipes in *Rashomon*, for instance, fulfill one of three purposes: emphasizing motion in traveling shots, marking narrative shifts in the courtyard scenes and marking temporal ellipses between actions (e.g., between the end of one character's testimony and the beginning of another's). He also points out that in [The Lower Depths](#) (1957), in which Kurosawa completely avoided the use of wipes, the director cleverly manipulated people and props "in order to slide new visual images in and out of view much as a wipe cut does".

An instance of the wipe used as a satirical device can be seen in [Ikiru](#) (1952). A group of women visit the local government office to petition the bureaucrats to turn a waste area into a children's playground. The viewer is then shown a series of [point of view](#) shots of various bureaucrats, connected by wipe transitions, each of whom refers the group to another department. Nora Tennesen comments in her blog (which shows one example) that "the wipe technique makes [the sequence] funnier—images of bureaucrats are stacked like cards, each more punctilious than the last."



## Image-sound counterpoint

Kurosawa by all accounts always gave great attention to the soundtracks of his films (Teruyo Nogami's memoir gives many such examples).<sup>[41]</sup> In the late 1940s, he began to employ music for what he called "counterpoint" to the emotional content of a scene, rather than merely to reinforce the emotion, as Hollywood traditionally did (and still does). The inspiration for this innovation came from a family tragedy. When news reached Kurosawa of his father's death in 1948, he wandered aimlessly through the streets of Tokyo. His sorrow was magnified rather than diminished when he suddenly heard the cheerful, vapid song "The Cuckoo Waltz", and he hurried to escape from this "awful music". He then told his composer, Fumio Hayasaka, with whom he was working on *Drunken Angel*, to use "The Cuckoo Waltz" as ironic accompaniment to the scene in which the dying gangster, Matsunaga, sinks to his lowest point in the narrative.

This approach to music can also be found in *Stray Dog* (1949), a film released a year after *Drunken Angel*. In the climactic scene, the detective Murakami is fighting furiously with the murderer Yusa in a muddy field. The sound of a [Mozart](#) piece is suddenly heard, played on the piano by a woman in a nearby house. As one commentator notes, "In contrast to this scene of primitive violence, the serenity of the Mozart is, literally, other-worldly" and "the power of this elemental encounter is heightened by the music." Nor was Kurosawa's "ironic" use of the soundtrack limited to music. One critic observes that, in *Seven Samurai*, "During episodes of murder and mayhem, birds chirp in the background, as they do in the first scene when the farmers lament their seemingly hopeless fate."

## Recurring themes

### Master–disciple relationship

Many commentators have noted the frequent occurrence in Kurosawa's work of the complex relationship between an older and a younger man, who serve each other as master and disciple, respectively. This theme was clearly an expression of the director's life experience. "Kurosawa revered his teachers, in particular Kajiro Yamamoto, his mentor at Toho", according to Joan Mellen. "The salutary image of an older person instructing the young evokes always in Kurosawa's films high moments of pathos." The critic Tadao Sato considers the recurring character of the "master" to be a type of surrogate father, whose role it is to witness the young protagonist's moral growth and approve of it.

In his very first film, *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943), after the judo master Yano becomes the title character's teacher and spiritual guide, "the narrative [is] cast in the form of a chronicle studying the stages of the hero's growing mastery and maturity." The master-pupil relationship in the films of the postwar era—as depicted in such works as *Drunken Angel*, *Stray Dog*, *Seven Samurai*, *Red Beard* and *Dersu Uzala*—involves very little direct instruction, but much learning through experience and example;

Stephen Prince relates this tendency to the private and nonverbal nature of the concept of [Zen](#) enlightenment.

By the time of [Kagemusha](#) (1980), however, according to Prince, the meaning of this relationship has changed. A thief chosen to act as the double of a great lord continues his impersonation even after his master's death: "the relationship has become spectral and is generated from beyond the grave with the master maintaining a ghostly presence. Its end is death, not the renewal of commitment to the living that typified its outcome in earlier films." However, according to the director's biographer, in his final film, 1993's [Madadayo](#)—which deals with a teacher and his relationship with an entire group of ex-pupils—a sunnier vision of the theme emerges: "The students hold an annual party for their professor, attended by dozens of former students, now adults of varying age ... This extended sequence ... expresses, as only Kurosawa can, the simple joys of student-teacher relationships, of kinship, of being alive."

### **Heroic champion**

Kurosawa's is a *heroic* cinema, a series of dramas (mostly) concerned with the deeds and fates of larger-than-life heroes. Stephen Prince has identified the emergence of the unique Kurosawa protagonist with the immediate post-World War II period. The goal of the [American Occupation](#) to replace Japanese [feudalism](#) with [individualism](#) coincided with the director's artistic and social agenda: "Kurosawa welcomed the changed political climate and sought to fashion his own mature cinematic voice." The Japanese critic Tadao Sato concurs: "With defeat in World War II, many Japanese ... were dumbfounded to find that the government had lied to them and was neither just nor dependable. During this uncertain time Akira Kurosawa, in a series of first-rate films, sustained the people by his consistent assertion that the meaning of life is not dictated by the nation but something each individual should discover for himself through suffering." The filmmaker himself remarked that, during this period, "I felt that without the establishment of the self as a positive value there could be no freedom and no democracy."

The first such postwar hero was, atypically for the artist, a heroine—Yukie, played by Setsuko Hara, in [No Regrets for Our Youth](#) (1946). According to Prince, her "desertion of family and class background to assist a poor village, her perseverance in the face of enormous obstacles, her assumption of responsibility for her own life and for the well-being of others, and her [existential](#) loneliness ... are essential to Kurosawan heroism and make of Yukie the first coherent ... example." This "existential loneliness" is also exemplified by Dr. Sanada (Takashi Shimura) in *Drunken Angel*: "Kurosawa insists that his heroes take their stand, alone, against tradition and battle for a better world, even if the path there is not clear. Separation from a corrupt social system in order to alleviate human suffering, as Sanada does, is the only honorable course."

Many commentators regard *Seven Samurai* as the ultimate expression of the artist's heroic ideal. Joan Mellen's comments are typical of this view: "Seven Samurai is above all a homage to the samurai class at its most noble ... Samurai for Kurosawa represent the best of Japanese tradition and integrity." It is because of, not in spite of, the chaotic times of civil war depicted in the film that the seven rise to greatness. "Kurosawa locates the unexpected benefits no less than the tragedy of this historical

moment. The upheaval forces samurai to channel the selflessness of their credo of loyal service into working for peasants." However, this heroism is futile because "there was already rising ... a merchant class which would supplant the warrior aristocracy."<sup>[58]</sup> So the courage and supreme skill of the central characters will not prevent the ultimate destruction of themselves or their class.

As Kurosawa's career progressed he seemed to find it increasingly difficult to sustain the heroic ideal. As Prince notes, "Kurosawa's is an essentially tragic vision of life, and this sensibility ... impedes his efforts to realize a socially committed mode of filmmaking." Furthermore, the director's ideal of heroism is subverted by history itself: "When history is articulated as it is in *Throne of Blood*, as a blind force ... heroism ceases to be a problem or a reality." According to Prince, the filmmaker's vision eventually became so bleak that he would come to view history merely as eternally recurring patterns of violence, within which the individual is depicted as not only unheroic, but utterly helpless (see "[Cycles of violence](#)" below).

### **Nature and weather**

Nature is a crucial element in Kurosawa's films. According to Stephen Prince, "Kurosawa's sensibility, like that of many Japanese artists, is keenly sensitive to the subtleties and beauties of season and scenery." He has never hesitated to exploit climate and weather as plot elements, to the point where they become "active participants in the drama ... The oppressive heat in *Stray Dog* and *I Live in Fear* is omnipresent and becomes thematized as a signifier of a world disjointed by economic collapse and the atomic threat." The director himself once said, "I like hot summers, cold winters, heavy rains and snows, and I think most of my pictures show this. I like extremes because I find them most alive."

Wind is also a powerful symbol: "The persistent metaphor of Kurosawa's work is that of wind, the winds of change, of fortune and adversity." "The visually flamboyant [final] battle [of *Yojimbo*] takes place in the main street, as huge clouds of dust swirl around the combatants ... The winds that stir the dust ... have brought firearms to the town along with the culture of the West, which will end the warrior tradition."

It is also difficult not to notice the importance of rain to Kurosawa: "Rain in Kurosawa's films is never treated neutrally. When it occurs ... it is never a drizzle or a light mist but always a frenzied downpour, a driving storm." "The final battle [in *Seven Samurai*] is a supreme spiritual and physical struggle, and it is fought in a blinding rainstorm, which enables Kurosawa to visualize an ultimate fusion of social groups ... but this climactic vision of classlessness, with typical Kurosawan ambivalence, has become a vision of horror. The battle is a vortex of swirling rain and mud ... The ultimate fusion of social identity emerges as an expression of hellish chaos."

### **Cycles of violence**

Beginning with *Throne of Blood* (1957), an obsession with historical cycles of inexorable savage violence—what Stephen Prince calls "the countertradition to the committed, heroic mode of Kurosawa's cinema"—first appears. According to [Donald Richie](#), within the world of that film, "Cause and effect is the only law. Freedom does not exist." and Prince claims that its events "are inscribed in a cycle of time that

infinitely repeats." He uses as evidence the fact that Washizu's lord, unlike the kindly [King Duncan](#) of Shakespeare's play, had murdered his own lord years before to seize power, and is then murdered in turn by Washizu (the Macbeth character) for the same reason. "The fated quality to the action of [Macbeth](#) ... was transposed by Kurosawa with a sharpened emphasis upon predetermined action and the crushing of human freedom beneath the laws of [karma](#)."

Prince claims that Kurosawa's last epics, *Kagemusha* and particularly *Ran*, mark a major turning point in the director's vision of the world. In *Kagemusha*, "where once [in the world of his films] the individual [hero] could grasp events tightly and demand that they conform to his or her impulses, now the self is but the epiphenomenon of a ruthless and bloody temporal process, ground to dust beneath the weight and force of history." The following epic, *Ran*, is "a relentless chronicle of base lust for power, betrayal of the father by his sons, and pervasive wars and murders." The historical setting of the film is used as "a commentary on what Kurosawa now perceives as the timelessness of human impulses toward violence and self-destruction." "History has given way to a perception of life as a wheel of endless suffering, ever turning, ever repeating", which is compared in many instances in the screenplay with hell. "Kurosawa has found hell to be both the inevitable outcome of human behaviour and the appropriate visualization of his own bitterness and disappointment."

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**Kindly visit the Web Link to see/view:**

Akira Kurosawa

TOP 10 Best Films

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfbTQ+M8GTQ>

Happy Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month!! Even though our Honoree for this Month was always a Japanese Citizen, He is still One of the Greatest Heroes of Film in Japan. Witness the Top 10 Best Films of "The Emperor," Akira Kurosawa: One of the Greatest Filmmakers of All Time.





## ACADEMY AWARDS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH DATABASE

Year: 1989 (62nd) Academy Awards

Category: Honorary Award

Winner: To Akira Kurosawa for accomplishments that have inspired, delighted, enriched and entertained audiences and influenced filmmakers throughout the world. (with Japanese translator Audie Bock)

Presenter: George Lucas, Steven Spielberg (including a taped segment from Japan)

Date & Venue: March 26, 1990; Dorothy Chandler Pavilion

[AKIRA KUROSAWA \[via translator\]:](#)

I am very deeply honored to receive such a wonderful prize, but I have to ask whether I really deserve it. I'm a little worried, because I don't feel that I understand cinema yet. I really don't feel that I have yet grasped the essence of cinema. Cinema is a marvelous thing, but to grasp its true essence is very, very difficult. But what I promise you is that from now on I will work as hard as I can at making movies and maybe by following this path, I will achieve an understanding of the true essence of cinema and earn this award. George [Lucas], Steven [Spielberg]. Thank you.



[Watch the video](#)

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# List of Awards and Honours Received

by

**Akira Kurosawa**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_awards\\_and\\_honours\\_received\\_by\\_Akira\\_Kurosawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_awards_and_honours_received_by_Akira_Kurosawa)



**Akira Kurosawa's handprint in cement in Cannes, France, home of the Cannes Film Festival.**

The following table is a selected list of awards and honors given to the Japanese film director [Akira Kurosawa](#).

## Categories

The list represents three categories of film awards or honors:

- Best Film awards given to a Kurosawa-directed film, whether Kurosawa directly received the award or not (including "Foreign Film" awards);
- Best Director or Best Screenplay awards to Kurosawa for a Kurosawa-directed film;
- Career achievement awards.

For reasons of space, two categories of awards have been excluded from the table below:

- Nominations for awards given to either Kurosawa himself or to films he directed which he or the film did not subsequently win (e.g., the nomination of [Throne of Blood](#) for the [Venice Film Festival Golden Lion](#) award in 1957; his own nomination for [Best Director](#) for [Ran](#) at the [58th Academy Awards](#));
- Awards given to cast members of Kurosawa-directed films, or to crew members other than Kurosawa (e.g., [Toshiro Mifune](#)'s Best Actor prize for [Yojimbo](#) at the 1961 Venice Film Festival; [Emi Wada](#)'s Oscar for [Ran](#) at the 1985 Academy Awards).

## Data

The information in the table is derived from the [IMDb](#) Akira Kurosawa awards page and the IMDb awards pages for the individual films, supplemented by the filmography by Kurosawa's biographer, Stuart Galbraith IV, unless otherwise noted.

**Key:** (NK) = Not known; (P) = Posthumous award

## Table

### Film Awards

Year of Award or Honor (if known)	Name of Award or Honor	Awarding Organization (if known)	Country of Origin	Given for...	Film Title (if applicable)
(NK)	Sadao Yamanaka Prize	(NK)	Japan	Film	<a href="#"><i>Sanshiro Sugata</i></a> (1943)
(NK)	The National Incentive Film Prize [Shared with <i>Torii Kyouemon</i> ]	(NK)	Japan	Film	<i>Sanshiro Sugata</i>
1948	<a href="#">Mainichi Film Concours</a>	<a href="#">Mainichi Shimbun</a> (newspaper)	Japan	Directing	<a href="#"><i>One Wonderful Sunday</i></a> (1947)
1949	Kinema Jumbo Award (Critics' Award)	<a href="#">Kinema Jumbo magazine</a>	Japan	Film	<a href="#"><i>Drunken Angel</i></a> (1948)
1949	Mainichi Film Concours	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Film	<i>Drunken Angel</i>
(NK)	Geijutsusai (Arts Festival) Grand Prize	Ministry of Education	Japan	Film	<a href="#"><i>Stray Dog</i></a> (1949)
1951	<a href="#">Blue Ribbon Award</a>	The Association of Tokyo Film Journalists	Japan	Screenplay (with <a href="#">Shinobu Hashimoto</a> )	<a href="#"><i>Rashomon</i></a> (1950)

1951	<a href="#">Golden Lion</a> (First prize) <sup>[note 1]</sup>	<a href="#">Venice Film Festival</a>	Italy	Film	<i>Rashomon</i>
1951	NBR Award	<a href="#">National Board of Review</a>	USA	<a href="#">Film, Directing</a>	<i>Rashomon</i>
1952	Honorary Award - Outstanding Foreign Language Film <sup>[note 2]</sup>	<a href="#">AMPAS</a> ( <a href="#">Academy Award</a> )	USA	Film	<i>Rashomon</i>
1953	Kinema Jumbo Award	Kinema Jumbo magazine	Japan	Film	<a href="#">Ikiru</a> (1952)
1953	Mainichi Film Concours	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Film, Screenplay (with Shinobu Hashimoto and Hideo Oguni)	<i>Ikiru</i>
(NK)	Arts Festival	Ministry of Education	Japan	Film	<i>Ikiru</i>
1954	Special Prize of the Senate of Berlin	<a href="#">Berlin Film Festival</a>	West Germany	Film	<i>Ikiru</i>
1954	<a href="#">Silver Lion</a> of St. Mark (Second Prize)	Venice Film Festival	Italy	Film	<a href="#">Seven Samurai</a> (1954)
1959	Diploma of Merit	<a href="#">Jussi Award</a>	Finland	Directing	<i>Seven Samurai</i>



1959	Blue Ribbon Award	The Association of Tokyo Film Journalists	Japan	Film	<a href="#"><i>The Hidden Fortress</i></a> (1958)
1959	Silver Berlin Bear	Berlin Film Festival	West Germany	Directing	<i>The Hidden Fortress</i>
1959	<a href="#">FIPRESCI</a> Prize	The International Federation of Film Critics (Berlin Film Festival)	West Germany	Film	<i>The Hidden Fortress</i>
1961	Golden Laurel Award <sup>[3]</sup>	<a href="#">David O. Selznick</a>	USA	Film	<i>Ikiru</i>
1964	Mainichi Film Concours	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Film, Screenplay (with Ryuzo Kikushima, Eijiro Hisaita and Hideo Oguni)	<a href="#"><i>High and Low</i></a> (1963)
1964	Golden Laurel Award	David O. Selznick	USA	Film	<i>High and Low</i>
1965	Asahi Culture Prize	<a href="#">Asahi Shimbun</a>	Japan	Film	<a href="#"><i>Red Beard</i></a> (1965)
1965	Foreign Honorary Member <sup>[4]</sup>	<a href="#">American Academy of Arts and Sciences</a>	USA	Career	
1965	Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts	<a href="#">Ramon Magsaysay Award</a>	Philippines	Career	

1965	OCIC Award	OCIC (later <a href="#">Signis</a> ) (Venice Film Festival)	Italy	Directing	<i>Red Beard</i>
(NK)	Soviet Filmmakers' Association Prize <sup>[5]</sup>	<a href="#">Moscow Film Festival</a>	USSR	Film	<i>Red Beard</i>
(NK)	Million Pearl Award	Tokyo Roei	Japan	Film	<i>Red Beard</i>
(NK)	NHK Award	<a href="#">NHK</a> (broadcaster )	Japan	Film	<i>Red Beard</i>
1966	Blue Ribbon Award	The Association of Tokyo Film Journalists	Japan	Film	<i>Red Beard</i>
1966	Mainichi Film Concours	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Film	<i>Red Beard</i>
1966	Kinema Jumbo Award	Kinema Jumbo magazine	Japan	Film Directing	<i>Red Beard</i>
(NK)	Geijutsusai (Arts Festival) Prize for Excellence <sup>[5]</sup>	Ministry of Education	Japan	Film	<a href="#">Dodesukaden</a> (aka, <i>Dodeskaden</i> ) (1970)
1975	Golden Prize <sup>[6]</sup>	<a href="#">9th Moscow International Film Festival</a>	USSR	Film	<a href="#">Dersu Uzala</a> (1975)
1975	FIPRESCI Prize	The International Federation of Film Critics (Moscow Film Festival)	USSR	Film	<i>Dersu Uzala</i>

1976	<a href="#">Best Foreign Language Film</a>	AMPAS (Academy Awards)	USA	Film	<i>Dersu Uzala</i>
1977	David	<a href="#">David di Donatello</a> Awards	Italy	<a href="#">Directing</a>	<i>Dersu Uzala</i>
1977	<a href="#">Silver Ribbon</a>	Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists	Italy	Film	<i>Dersu Uzala</i>
1978	Prix Léon Moussinac	Syndicate of French Film Critics	France	Film	<i>Dersu Uzala</i>
1978	Golden Halo	Southern California Motion Picture Council	USA	Film	<i>Dersu Uzala</i>
1979	Honorary Prize	<a href="#">11th Moscow International Film Festival</a>	USSR	Career <sup>[2]</sup>	-
1980	<a href="#">Palme d'Or</a> (First Prize)	<a href="#">Cannes Film Festival</a>	France	Film	<a href="#">Kagemusha</a> (1980)
1980	<a href="#">Hochi Film Award</a>	<a href="#">Hochi Shimbun</a> (newspaper)	Japan	Film	<i>Kagemusha</i>
1981	Blue Ribbon Award	The Association of Tokyo Film Journalists	Japan	Film	<i>Kagemusha</i>
1981	Mainichi Film Concours	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Film, Directing	<i>Kagemusha</i>
1981	Reader's Choice Award	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Film	<i>Kagemusha</i>


1981	César	<a href="#">César Awards</a>	France	Film	<i>Kagemusha</i>
1981	David	David di Donatello Awards	Italy	<a href="#">Directing</a>	<i>Kagemusha</i>
1981	<a href="#">BAFTA Film Award</a>	<a href="#">BAFTA</a>	UK	<a href="#">Directing</a>	<i>Kagemusha</i>
1981	Silver Ribbon	Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists	Italy	Directing	<i>Kagemusha</i>
1982	Career Golden Lion	Venice Film Festival	Italy	Career	-
1985	LAFCA Award	<a href="#">Los Angeles Film Critics Association</a>	USA	<a href="#">Film</a> , Career	<a href="#">Ran</a> (1985)
1985	NBR Award	National Board of Review	USA	<a href="#">Film</a> , <a href="#">Directing</a>	<i>Ran</i>
1985	OCIC Award	OCIC (later Signis) ( <a href="#">San Sebastián Film Festival</a> )	Spain	Film	<i>Ran</i>
1985	BSFC Award	<a href="#">Boston Society of Film Critics</a>	USA	<a href="#">Film</a>	<i>Ran</i>
1985	<a href="#">NFCC Award</a>	New York Film Critics Circle	USA	<a href="#">Film</a>	<i>Ran</i>
1986	NSFC Award	National Society of Film Critics	USA	<a href="#">Film</a>	<i>Ran</i>



1986	<a href="#">Amanda Award</a>	<a href="#">Norwegian International Film Festival</a>	Norway	Film	<i>Ran</i>
1986	Blue Ribbon Award	The Association of Tokyo Film Journalists	Japan	Film	<i>Ran</i>
1986	Bodil	<a href="#">Bodil Awards</a>	Denmark	<a href="#">Film</a>	<i>Ran</i>
1986	David	David di Donatello Awards	Italy	<a href="#">directing</a>	<i>Ran</i>
1986	Mainichi Film Concours	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Film, Directing	<i>Ran</i>
1986	Golden Jubilee Award	<a href="#">Directors Guild of America</a>	USA	Career	-
1986	Akira Kurosawa Award	<a href="#">San Francisco International Film Festival</a>	USA	Career	-
1987	BAFTA Film Award	BAFTA	UK	<a href="#">Film</a>	<i>Ran</i>
1987	ALFS Award	<a href="#">London Film Critics' Circle</a>	UK	Film, Directing	<i>Ran</i>
1989	Lifetime Achievement Award	<a href="#">Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Academy Awards</a>	USA	Career	
1990	Special Prize	<a href="#">Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize</a>	Japan	Career	

1992	Lifetime Achievement Award	Directors Guild of America	USA	Career	
1994	<a href="#">Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy</a>	<a href="#">Inamori Foundation</a>	Japan	Career	
1998	Special Award (for his work) (P)	Nikkan Sports Film Award	Japan	Career	-
1999	Lifetime Achievement Award (P)	<a href="#">Awards of the Japanese Academy</a>	Japan	Career	-
1999	Blue Ribbon Award Special Award (for his work) (P)	The Association of Tokyo Film Journalists	Japan	Career	-
1999	Mainichi Film Concours Special Award (for his work) (P)	Mainichi Shimbun	Japan	Career	-
1999	Asian of the Century Award (Arts, Literature and Culture) (P)	<a href="#">CNN AsianWeek</a> (US)	USA	Career	-

### State and National Awards

Year of Award	Name of Award	Native Name	Country	Notes
1976	<a href="#">Person of Cultural Merit</a>	文化功労者	 Japan	<a href="#">[9]</a>

1981	Grand Officer of the <a href="#">Order of Merit of the Italian Republic</a>	Grande Ufficiale <i>Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana</i>	 Italy <sup>[10]</sup>
1984	Officer of the <a href="#">Legion of Honour</a>	Officier du <i>Légion d'honneur</i>	 France <sup>[11]</sup>
1985	<a href="#">Order of Culture</a>	文化勲章	 Japan <sup>[12]</sup>
	Commander of the <a href="#">Order of Arts and Letters</a>	Commandeur du <i>Ordre des Arts et des Lettres</i>	 France <sup>[13]</sup>
1986	Knight Grand Cross of the <a href="#">Order of Merit of the Italian Republic</a>	Cavaliere di Gran Croce <i>Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana</i>	 Italy <sup>[14]</sup>
1992	<a href="#">Praemium Imperiale</a>	高松宮殿下記念世界文化賞	 Japan <sup>[9]</sup>
1998	<a href="#">People's Honour Award</a>	国民栄誉賞	 Japan (P) <sup>[15]</sup>
	<a href="#">Junior Third Rank</a>	従三位	 Japan (P) <sup>[15]</sup>

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# Akira Kurosawa

10 essential films

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/lists/akira-kurosawa-10-essential-films>

Akira Kurosawa redefined the action film with his samurai epics set in Japan's medieval past. Here are 10 of his best movies.

23 March 2015



Akira Kurosawa  
By [Jasper Sharp](#)

## Lists

Akira Kurosawa (23 March 1910 to 6 September 1998) is one of Japanese cinema's few household names in the west, due to such groundbreaking jidaigeki period action films as *Seven Samurai* (1954), *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) and *Kagemusha* (1980).

The enduring popularity of such titles lies in no small part to their open influence from Hollywood, particularly the westerns of directors such as John Ford. This in itself is reflected in the ease by which they've in turn established an action template so readily adapted by filmmakers from all over the world. Take a look at any recent historical epic, or indeed the Manichean battle scenes that comprise so much of Peter Jackson's Tolkien adaptations, and try to imagine how they might look in an alternate universe in which Kurosawa never existed.

The obvious influence of these more monumental titles makes it easy to overlook the more humanistic, personal aspects of the master's wide array of low-key, contemporary dramas and potent literary adaptations. With 30 titles to his name as a director since his 1943 debut *Sanshiro Sugata* (and many more as a screenwriter), distilling Kurosawa's must-see titles into a tidy top 10 list is something of a fool's errand. There is nothing subpar within this large and varied body of work, and I've omitted many a worthy title in the aim of giving a fuller picture of the fruits of an incredible 6-decade filmmaking career.





### **No Regrets for Our Youth (1946)**

Inspired by several real-life incidents, *No Regrets for Our Youth* is an intelligent and balanced drama about wavering ideologies and personal allegiances set between 1933-46, the years of imperial Japan's increasing militarisation through to its wartime defeat.

Yukie is the privileged daughter of a Kyoto University law professor who is controversially removed from his post for his leftist beliefs. The film portrays her relationships over the years with 2 of his former students, both rival for her affections, and her love affair and ensuing marriage to one of them, who is arrested for his anti-government activities and subsequently disappears from public view.

Kurosawa's oeuvre is not particularly regarded for its focus on sympathetic female characters, but the central turn by Setsuko Hara (better known for her work with Yasujiro Ozu) in his fifth feature (and first of the postwar period) showcases another side to the director, and also counts as his most overtly political work.



### **Scandal (1950)**

The first of 2 films Kurosawa made for the Shochiku studio (alongside the Dostoevsky adaptation *The Idiot* in 1951), this punchy social drama takes a righteous swipe at the

gutter press, as Toshiro Mifune's up-and-coming painter is snapped by the paparazzi while sitting on a hotel balcony with a famous singer (played by Yoshiko Yamaguchi), the photo inspiring a fabricated story in a popular gossip magazine. Needless to say, the outraged artist refuses to take things lying down and vows to take the magazine's editor to court.

A lesser-known work from the master, *Scandal* is nonetheless worth checking out not only as an example of Kurosawa's technical virtuosity and strong compositional approach, but for its critique of some of the less palatable aspects of westernisation.



**Rashomon (1950)**

The film that launched Kurosawa's name outside his homeland (and those of its stars Toshiro Mifune and Machiko Kyo), *Rashomon's* Golden Lion Award at Venice in 1951 awakened a postwar generation of international festival and arthouse audiences to the manifold pleasures of Japanese cinema.

Combining 2 short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, its script also broke the mould of conventional cinema plotting, introducing the concept of the unreliable narrator in its contradictory accounts of the rape of a samurai's wife as relayed by the key suspects and witnesses to the crime, including one testimony delivered from the murdered samurai himself by a medium. The masterful atmospheric cinematography of Kazuo Miyagawa, and the late-10th-century Heian period setting adds to the haunting, purgatorial ambience.



**Ikiru (1952)**

The story of an undistinguished, time-serving civil servant who, upon learning he has stomach cancer, channels his energies into one final positive act, building a children's playground in a disease-ridden slum quarter, is truly heart-rending stuff. Kurosawa regular Takashi Shimura is wonderful as the man who only finds meaning in his life as death rears its ugly head, while his in-laws wrangle over his pension pot. His absent presence in the final sections provides a more down-to-earth mirror inverse to Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).



**Seven Samurai (1954)**

Set during the civil war of the late-16th-century Warring States period, Kurosawa's massively influential magnum opus depicts a group of masterless samurai recruited by a farming community to fend off frequent raids by a gang of bandits.

The most expensive Japanese production of its day, it introduced all the hallmarks associated with Kurosawa's name: an epic runtime detailing the recruitment of the mercenary force, the training of the farmers, and the fortification of the village in anticipation of the climactic attack (the original western release was trimmed down from the original 207 minutes); on-location shooting with a strong focus on landscapes and environmental conditions to reflect the inner psychologies of the human elements within them; a fastidious recreation of sets, costumes and weaponry of the era; and lots and lots of stunning horse-bound battle sequences shot using multiple camera setups.



**Throne of Blood (1957)**

Although the script uses not a single line from its source, Kurosawa's celebrated transplantation of Macbeth to the lawless realm of 16th-century Japan counts among the finest screen adaptations of Shakespeare ever realised, a faithful rendition of the story that works perfectly within its own historical context.

Its title translates literally as 'Spider's Web Castle', and the gothic setting of a deserted castle filled with dark shadows and swathed in fog forms the perfect frame for Mifune's tortured turn as Washizu, the samurai usurper haunted by past crimes. The austere staging and performances, drawing upon traditional Noh theatre, lend an appropriate note of theatricality to proceedings, blurring the gap between the real and the supernatural, while Kurosawa surpasses even himself with the quite jaw-dropping climax as Washizu's violent misdeeds catch up with him.



### Yojimbo (1961)

Partly inspired by George Stevens's *Shane* (1952), Kurosawa's quintessential 'samurai/western' *Yojimbo* ('The Bodyguard') thrives on this cross-cultural synergy, right down to the soundtrack. As Mifune's enigmatic masterless samurai roams into a desolate town overrun by grotesque rival criminal gangs, the whistling wind whisks leaves down deserted streets through which a dog runs with a severed human hand clamped in its mouth and the grimy residents, cowering behind shutters, fear to tread.

The relatively modest 110-minute runtime makes this (and its shorter 1962 follow-up *Sanjuro*) a more accessible entry point into Kurosawa's oeuvre than his more grandiose swords-and-samurai sagas. With Japan's studio system increasingly incapable of accommodating the costs of the long shooting periods and large-scale sets and action sequences required for his productions, Kurosawa left his studio Toho after *Red Beard* (1965). Aside from the independently produced *Dodes'ka-den* in 1970 (remarkably, his first film in colour), he would not direct another film in his homeland for 15 years.





### Dersu Uzala (1975)

With the financial and critical failure of Dodes'ka-den, a portrait of the grimy denizens of a shantytown on the outskirts of Tokyo, an attempted suicide threatened to put an end to Kurosawa's career. Fortunately an invitation from the Soviet Union's Mosfilm to helm this Siberia-set 70mm adaptation of explorer Captain Vladimir Arsenyev's 1923 autobiography put him firmly back on the international map.

Based on Arsenyev's encounters in 1902 with the elderly, gnomic, nature-loving scout from the nomadic Nanai tribe who lends his name to the film (and served as a model for George Lucas's creation, Yoda), it sees Kurosawa back in epic form as the 2 wrestle against the ice and snow of the steppes. It received the year's Academy Award for best foreign language film.



### Ran (1985)

Following his reappearance on the world stage, Kurosawa returned to the world of jidaigeki epic with 2 international co-productions, Kagemusha (1980), which George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola persuaded 20th Century Fox to part-finance, and this



Possessing a similar synthesis of psychological tension and austere formal elegance to its more claustrophobic companion piece, *Throne of Blood*, it is even bigger and bolder in ambition. With its accumulated wide-shots of threatening ranks of horsemen clutching banners assembled on distant hilltops and a standout scene in which overthrown warlord Hidetora wanders in a confused daze from the apocalyptic conflagration of his besieged castle, every image is so meticulously composed, every scene so perfectly constructed, as to provide the kind of satori moments of transcendent stupefaction all but lost in the CG age.



Devoid of the elaborate action sequences and intense inner dramas for which he is renowned, and featuring a whimsical mid-section involving a missing cat that lasts almost half an hour, Kurosawa's directorial swansong initially seems slightly underwhelming. A portrait of the academic and author Hyakken Uchida (1889–1971), unfolding across the decades following Uchida's retirement just prior to the beginning of Second World War, much of its runtime is given over to the good cheer accompanying the riotous annual drinking parties held every year to mark his birthday by the former students who venerate him.

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# Akira Kurosawa

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akira\\_Kurosawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akira_Kurosawa)

Akira Kurosawa

黒澤 明

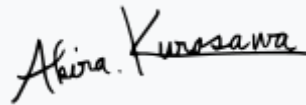


Kurosawa in 1960

<b>Born</b>	March 23, 1910 <a href="#">Shinagawa, Tokyo, Empire of Japan</a>
<b>Died</b>	September 6, 1998 (aged 88) <a href="#">Setagaya, Tokyo, Japan</a>
<b>Resting place</b>	<a href="#">An'yō-in, Kamakura, Kanagawa, Japan</a>
<b>Occupations</b>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Film director</li><li>• screenwriter</li><li>• producer</li><li>• editor</li></ul></div>
<b>Years active</b>	1936–1993
<b>Notable work</b>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Rashomon</a> (1950)</li><li>• <a href="#">Seven Samurai</a> (1954)</li><li>• <a href="#">Throne of Blood</a> (1957)</li><li>• <a href="#">Yojimbo</a> (1961)</li><li>• <a href="#">High and Low</a> (1963)</li><li>• <a href="#">Ran</a> (1985)</li></ul></div>
<b>Spouse</b>	<a href="#">Yōko Yaguchi</a>  (m. 1945; died 1985)
<b>Children</b>	Hisao (b. 1945–) and <a href="#">Kazuko</a> (b. 1954–)
<b>Awards</b>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Golden Lion</a> (1951)</li><li>• <a href="#">Palme d'Or</a> (1980)</li><li>• <a href="#">Légion d'honneur</a> (1984)</li></ul></div>

- [Order of Culture](#) (1985)
- [Academy Award](#) (1990)

Signature



**Akira Kurosawa** (黒澤 明 or 黒沢 明, *Kurosawa Akira*, March 23, 1910 – September 6, 1998) was a Japanese filmmaker who [created 30 films of his own](#) as well as occasionally directing and writing for others in a career spanning seven decades. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest and most influential filmmakers in the [history of cinema](#). Kurosawa displayed a [bold, dynamic style](#) strongly influenced by Western cinema yet distinct from it. He was involved with all aspects of [film production](#).

Kurosawa entered the [Japanese film industry](#) in 1936, following a brief stint as a painter. After years of working on numerous films as an [assistant director](#) and scriptwriter, he made his debut as a director during World War II with the popular [action film \*Sanshiro Sugata\*](#) (1943). After the war, the critically acclaimed [Drunken Angel](#) (1948), in which Kurosawa cast the then little-known actor [Toshiro Mifune](#) in a starring role, cemented the director's reputation as one of the most important young filmmakers in Japan. The two men would go on to collaborate on another fifteen films.

[Rashomon](#) (1950), which premiered in Tokyo, became the surprise winner of the [Golden Lion](#) at the 1951 [Venice Film Festival](#). The commercial and critical success of that film opened up Western film markets for the first time to the products of the Japanese film industry, which in turn led to international recognition for other Japanese filmmakers. Kurosawa directed approximately one film per year throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, including a number of highly regarded (and often adapted) films, including [Ikiru](#) (1952), [Seven Samurai](#) (1954), [Throne of Blood](#) (1957), [The Hidden Fortress](#) (1958), [Yojimbo](#) (1961), [High and Low](#) (1963) and [Red Beard](#) (1965). After the 1960s he became much less prolific; even so, his later work – including two of his final films, [Kagemusha](#) (1980) and [Ran](#) (1985) – continued to receive great acclaim.

In 1990, he accepted the [Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement](#). Posthumously, he was named "[Asian of the Century](#)" in the "Arts, Literature, and Culture" category by [AsianWeek](#) magazine and [CNN](#), cited there as being among the five people who most prominently contributed to the improvement of Asia in the 20th century. His career has been honored by many retrospectives, critical studies and biographies in both print and video, and by releases in many consumer media. Kurosawa told the critic [Donald Richie](#): "I suppose all of my films have a common theme. If I think about it, though, the only theme I can think of is really a question: Why can't people be happier together?"

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# Filmography Worship

## Ranking Every Akira K

<https://www.filmsfatale.com/blog/2024/9/6/filmography-worship-ranking-every-akira-kurosawa-filmurosawa Film>



It feels obvious to say that Akira Kurosawa is one of the greatest filmmakers of all time (as well as point out that he is a personal favourite of mine), but here we are. It's being stated because it is true, and I will never not seize the opportunity to honour an all-time legend and innovator of the cinematic medium when an opportunity arises. Seeing as today marks the twenty sixth anniversary of the auteur's passing (by the time this article is published), there's no greater opportunity to celebrate Akira Kurosawa (then again, any day seems appropriate when you love motion pictures). The biggest influence on action films, period piece dramas, war epics, how black-and-white films can be conceived, the art of cinematic direction overall (and the pivot of artistic control from producers to directors), and so many other parts of the filmic experience, Kurosawa's impact cannot be simplified in any random article like this one. I will still try my best to replicate his importance in the ranking of his films, but it won't do his history and legacy any noteworthy justice.

Kurosawa found beauty, humanity, and purpose in devastation at a young age, when his older brother, Heigo (who died at the young age of twenty seven, and before Kurosawa began making motion pictures) took him to see the wreckage and wake of the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923; there, Kurosawa saw the power of images and what can be conveyed by sight and without being told how to feel. Having been driven to want to make fine art before motion pictures, Kurosawa was further inspired by his elder brother as the latter narrated silent films in the early days of the Japanese cinema scene; Kurosawa found that film displayed art throughout its medium as a result. He fell out of love of painting as well, as the politics of the world around him tainted what he could put on the canvas; it was inescapable. So were other turmoils, including brother Heigo losing work after the

start of talking pictures; due to his struggles, Heigo ultimately committed suicide, which permanently changed Akira Kurosawa.

Kurosawa became an assistant director a few years later, likely because he and his family were in desperate need of money after numerous woes during a hard time in Japan. This is where Kurosawa began to soar, with his first feature film, *Sanshiro Sugata*, being released in 1943. While training as an assistant director, he was taught by mentors that to get the best grasp on filmmaking, one should become a strong storyteller (or choose stories from those who were). This early action film's original story spoke to him, and it's a thread that would continue in Kurosawa's life. He was inspired and fascinated by the Russian literary classics (you'll find numerous adaptations below), amongst other powerful tales. He knew that film could be not just art but a storytelling vehicle as well. After *Sanshiro Sugata*, Kurosawa experimented a bit to find his footing. It wouldn't be long before he would.

I don't need to say much about his prime, because he *dominated* the fifties with many masterpieces (most of which you will find near the top of this ranking). He was on top of the world, even during a time when international cinema wasn't getting quite the reach that it deserved (*Rashomon* was a big reason why the Academy Awards created a category for films not in the English language, because of its massive influence and reception). Even with this dominance, the film industry is a fickle and unforgiving one. After decades of masterwork after masterwork, Kurosawa tried to make something different with *Dodes'ka-den* in 1970. The sillier tone of the film, the financial risk, and numerous aesthetic gambles (including the first use of colour in a Kurosawa film) resulted in a terrible reception, and Kurosawa nearly followed in his older brother's footsteps when he attempted — and survived — suicide.

It goes without saying that Kurosawa endured numerous hardships, and he would continue to do so. Even after all of the brilliance and innovation he gave to the film industry, he truly struggled after *Dodes'ka-den* to regain his dominance. He released just one more film in the seventies: the Soviet-funded *Dersu Uzala* (which, by the way, is a criminally underrated film). It took the students of his craft, filmmakers like Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas who were indebted to the works of Kurosawa (Lucas' *Star Wars* is heavily inspired by *The Hidden Fortress*, for starters), to help Kurosawa get his epic *Kagemusha* to be made (the film, which studios tried to avoid, wound up winning the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival). Even with this help and renaissance, he suffered. His wife of nearly forty years, Yōko Yaguchi, died during the production of *Ran* in 1985. The same film was meant to be Japan's entry for Best International Feature Film at the Academy Awards — the very category Kurosawa's talent helped inspire — and the Japanese government decided to punish him after he didn't attend the film's premiere at the very first Tokyo International Film Festival. And so, it goes.

Again, it was the filmmakers Kurosawa inspired to make motion pictures who came to the rescue, with Sidney Lumet pushing for a campaign to get the titan nominated for Best Director (he, ultimately, lost to Sydney Pollack for *Out of Africa*, which



boggles my mind to this day). From that point on, it was as if Kurosawa fell in love with film — and life — all over again, proclaiming that he was finally understanding what makes a good film. All of his nineties films feel limitless (for better or for worse) and full of both heart and artistry. Unfortunately, he slipped and broke his spine in 1995, paralyzing himself from the waste down and needing a wheelchair. He wanted to die while working on a film, but the accident prevented him from making another film after 1993's *Madadayo*. Kurosawa would eventually pass away at eighty eight in 1998 after complications from his accident persisted for years. It breaks my heart how much distress Kurosawa experienced in his life when his works and lessons have brought joy, meaning, and enrichment to millions — maybe even billions — of lives.

This quick synopsis of Kurosawa's history won't do him any justice, because his legacy is far more complicated, detailed, and interesting than my blurbs could ever muster. I just wanted to give a bit of context to the works of a man whose existence and drive has meant the world to almost every cinephile to ever walk the Earth. Perhaps I am stalling, because ranking all thirty of his accessible films (I will be avoiding *Those Who Make Tomorrow*, which is seemingly lost despite being showcased at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo in 2004) seems like a highly difficult order. I will admit that over a dozen of his films are challenging to place in order, because they are all near-perfect to spotless. However, my number one film has been my favourite of his for most of my life, and that was the only easy selection for me. I feel like every Kurosawa fan has their one favourite that somehow speaks more to them than the other films, and I apologize in advance if I have placed yours lower on the list than you would like. You can imagine the caliber of the works you're about to read about. **Here are all of the feature films of Akira Kurosawa ranked from worst (or least best, I suppose) to best.**



### 30. THE MOST BEAUTIFUL

Even the worst Kurosawa film is moderately watchable. A propaganda film which is as cold as that label usually infers (although Kurosawa does try his absolute best to elevate the film of any such corrosion), *The Most Beautiful* is clearly

driven by the mindset that was bestowed upon Kurosawa, not his own artistry (although, even in this mediocre effort, his vision does shine enough to be noticeable). Allegedly, Kurosawa retained fond memories of this film, but I can't say the same for most film viewers.



## 29. THE MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL

While the auteur would become the master of the period drama (maybe the greatest to ever approach the style), Kurosawa's early effort, *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail*, feels a bit like a mish-mash of ideas and concepts whilst also being incredibly simplistic by Kurosawa's standards. Still, this is a decent enough film by a master that warrants a watch should you try to complete watching every Kurosawa film, but, as noble as this film is, it should be left towards the end of your marathon of the director's films (unless you want to conclude with a bang, of course).



## 28. SANSHIRO SUGATA PART II

While not quite as good as the first part (just barely), *Sanshiro Sugata Part II* is a film that is fine narratively (I suppose it's because it feels a teensy bit

derivative of Kurosawa's earliest film, which in and of itself is also just okay to begin with). However, I cannot shake off the early signs of artistic richness that can be found even in a film that is far from Kurosawa's greatest work; the imagery from the climax still resonates in my mind, despite the fact that I have only ever watched *Sanshiro Sugata Part II* once in my life. If you are curious about finding the seedlings of what Kurosawa would use to make the ultimate action films, these two films are a good place to discover them.



## 27. SANSHIRO SUGATA

As stated previously, *Sanshiro Sugata* and its sequel are great little treasure troves of ideas that Kurosawa would eventually turn into fully-fledged mastery. Still, I wouldn't call this search of meaning and value in the art of Judo a great film, as it feels rather limited overall. Even so, while it isn't one of the great cinematic debuts of all time, *Sanshiro Sugata* is still strong enough to prove that Kurosawa was born to make feature films. There is an artistry to the editing, sets, and theatrical acting here that suggest that Kurosawa always knew what he wanted to get from the medium; it was all a matter of figuring out how to get what he desired (which, clearly, he succeeded in doing shortly afterward).



## 26. RHAPSODY IN AUGUST

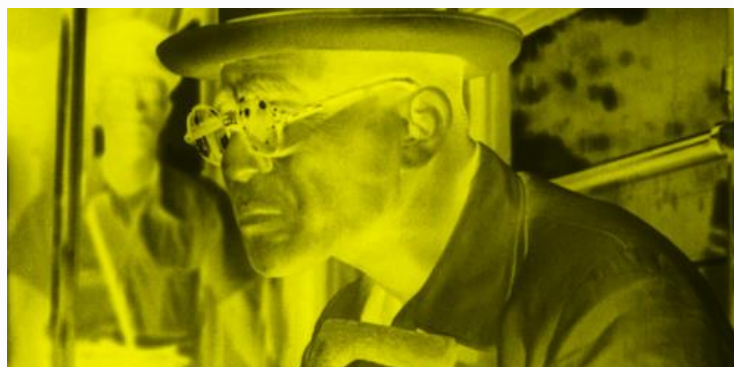


Kurosawa claimed that he only knew what he could achieve as a director in his old age, and that may have been true for some titles. That wasn't really the case with *Rhapsody in August*: a followup to his cult classic, *Dreams*, and an indication that he was starting to get too driven by the artistic imagery of a fantastic mind. Still, there is a poetic boldness to *Rhapsody in August* which elevates the film every so slightly, but otherwise this brisk, ninety minute film doesn't feel like it unearths everything that Kurosawa was going for; if you want something that feels lush and subliminally effective, then *Rhapsody in August* shall suffice.



## 25. SCANDAL

The quality of the films from this point on leaps a little bit, and we're entering the group of films by Kurosawa that I'd consider good and worthwhile for those who have seen the bulk of the director's established classics. While *Scandal* isn't the most effective film by him, it is a prophetic look at how the media works against the arts and the elite (a matter that was becoming all too real by the time this was released in 1950), and Kurosawa goes about the topic with enough depth and care to make his claims hold weight. It's a bit specific by Kurosawa's standards and without enough juice to make a real impact, but *Scandal* is a solid film that may give the biggest Kurosawa nuts something to enjoy.



## 24. I LIVE IN FEAR

Another forward-thinking film by Kurosawa, obviously made with the hindsight of the universal nuclear threats of World War II (and the Hiroshima damage that killed countless of citizens), *I Live in Fear* almost feels like the cynical sister film to *Ikiru*, as both works study elderly men who know that their demises are imminent and that they must act accordingly. *I Live in Fear* is far more anxious and full of dread, as a family man prepares for a fallout and becomes delirious in doing so. Perhaps a precursor to Kurosawa's friend (Andrei Tarkovsky) and his film *The Sacrifice* (which I think is a stronger take on the subject), *I Live in Fear* is still a really good look at paranoia and the constant panic of living in a world where the powers that be are out of our control (and the helplessness that ensues).



## 23. NO REGRETS FOR OUR YOUTH

Of the films that can be seen (so, essentially, all but one), *No Regrets for Our Youth* is the first Kurosawa film chronologically to feel like the director got somewhere substantial with his vision. As we follow a woman (played by the iconic Setsuko Hara) and her efforts to navigate a world that is very much up in the air (the days leading up to the Second World War), Kurosawa nails his ability to have a story that isn't necessarily driven solely by plot but by circumstances that pull characters into reactionary scenarios. He would become even better at making films that didn't feel by-the-numbers, but this is an early sign of him trying his hand at going off the beaten path of storytelling.



## 22. THE IDIOT



Now, this is a crying shame of a film. Naturally, Kurosawa's adaptation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* should actually be closer to the bottom of this list because it is clearly not a full film in the only available way one can watch it: heavily chopped up and trimmed down to the point of disrepair by a studio that didn't care about what the original, over four-hour version apparently delivered. With over an hour cut even in the fullest version one can watch now, *The Idiot* is incomplete. Even so, what we do get are glimpses of brilliance, and that is reason enough for me to place this film a bit higher than the very bottom. I adored the sequences as they stand on their own; the entire film just feels like a lost cause, sadly. One can only imagine that this could have been one of the greatest films by Kurosawa if it was left as is (and this is saying a lot, considering his career), but we'll never know for sure. This one may be left for the biggest Kurosawa fans because of its state, but I think that they will find much to cherish in one of the biggest what-ifs in cinematic history.



## 21. DREAMS

I'm going to catch quite a bit of flack for this one, but I do like *Dreams* quite a bit; maybe just not as much as its dearest fans. I think there are some vignettes in this anthological film that are stronger than others, and the weaker portions — while still visually stunning (no one can deny that) — only make me desire to return to the stories that work better. Having said that, this is clearly a film made by a veteran who had nothing to lose anymore, and the limitless feeling of *Dreams* is an obvious selling point for those who rank this amongst Kurosawa's best (I'm not one of those people, but I understand).



## 20. DODES'KA-DEN

It's time to put myself in some hot water: I actually quite like *Dodes'ka-den*, even though many would quickly rank this amongst Kurosawa's worst films (the brutal response the film got upon its release, and its financial backlash, infamously drove the director towards attempting suicide: an outcome no one deserves). Are parts a bit sloppy or even annoying? Sure, but I do think the positives weigh the negatives here. This film is a wonder to explore visually, with inventive sets and some great colour usage (this was his first film in colour after all, as the director strayed away from his iconic use of grayscale), and I think that enough of the storytelling of this impoverished community willing to get through hardship works. After his falling out with star Toshiro Mifune, and the financial gamble this film undertook so Kurosawa could achieve more, there was clearly much on the line of this despised film. I do recommend this underrated, misunderstood film, because its reputation is not just.



## 19. THE LOWER DEPTHS

Kurosawa's answer to the oft-adapted Maxim Gorky work, *The Lower Depths*, is a noble one that manages to understand the multifaceted necessities of the story. The film might not compare to the other films of Kurosawa's strongest era (the fifties), but it's worthwhile enough due to its strong acting, great use of its setting, and textured empathy. There may be a stronger adaptation of this story (my choice is Jean Renoir's 1936 answer), but Kurosawa's take holds its own well enough to matter.



## 18. THE QUIET DUEL

We'll be entering the spread of Kurosawa films that range from excellent to masterful, but first we must touch upon what may be one of his more underrated and underseen works: the poetic drama, *The Quiet Duel*. As we follow a doctor who has been infected by syphilis from a patient he is operating on, we watch his life wither away and his efforts to not infect others. There's a strong allegorical factor here as we watch the resistance to share misery with the more fortunate, and I think it's a beautiful take on the kind of moral compass we need more of in the world: one where we don't distribute our woes and hurt others.



## 17. ONE WONDERFUL SUNDAY



I think *One Wonderful Sunday* is disastrously overlooked, and is an exquisite film. While the film does exhibit traits of a director who is trying numerous techniques and choices to see what works (including a rare instance in a Kurosawa film where the fourth wall is broken), *One Wonderful Sunday* is a gorgeous answer to Italian Neorealism as we follow an optimistic-yet-suffering couple in need of work and security during wartime; with the romantic pair making the most of their woes, *One Wonderful Sunday* is the kind of uplifting comfort that many of us could use even nowadays.



## 16. MADADAYO

And so it begins: the stretch of Kurosawa films I consider must-watches by all cinephiles (we're only at the sixteenth-highest-rated film as well, so strap on in). His swan song, *Madadayo*, is a sensational response to the comedy drama films gunning for Academy Awards from the eighties and nineties, as Kurosawa's vision is far more interesting and well-intentioned than many of the films he is building upon (especially regarding coming-of-age films, or works with mentors leaving it all on the table for mentees). I know this film doesn't have the glowing reception of the biggest Kurosawa films, but *Madadayo* resonated greatly with me.



## 15. RED BEARD

Again, the films from this point on are ones I adore, so don't think too much of *Red Beard* being this low. My only chief complaint is that this epic is perhaps a little overlong (sure, Kurosawa has made longer films than this one, but I don't really know if *Red Beard* needed to be over three hours like some of Kurosawa's other efforts). Otherwise, this reflection on life and provenance is sublime, and it houses what may be one of Mifune's greatest performances (as the titular doctor) which drives this epic all the way to the finish line. As Kurosawa's farewell to black-and-white motion pictures, *Red Beard* does truly feel like a sendoff to the films of old as the director desired to venture into new territory from this point on, and this alone makes this bid adieu feel important and special for the filmmaker and viewers alike.



#### 14. THE BAD SLEEP WELL

Here's another film that I'd say misses out on being perfect because it is simply a little too long (to the point that it has a couple of lulls). Otherwise, *The Bad Sleep Well* contains some of Kurosawa's strongest direction, as we are yanked around with in this meandering, unpredictable thriller (this one is a must for mystery junkies). This film has been mimicked quite often (see, say, David Fincher's *The Game*), but what is missing from the many imitators is Kurosawa's legitimate placement of being five moves ahead of audiences (and not the mere implication of such). *The Bad Sleep Well* is some of Kurosawa's pulpiest storytelling simply because of how clever and labyrinth-like it is.



#### 13. DERSU UZALA



It was always clear that Kurosawa adored Russian literature and cinema, so it was only a matter of time for the Japanese titan to adapt a Soviet book in the Russian language. Such was the case when he interpreted the memoir, *Dersu Uzala* (by explorer Vladimir Arsenyev), for the big screen. I don't hear about this film enough, but it is *spectacular*. The winner of Best International Feature Film at the Academy Awards (a category, once known as Best Foreign Language Film, that Kurosawa inspired to exist back in the fifties due to his tremendous output), *Dersu Uzala* is an epic of emotions and humanistic fragility that is to be seen to be believed; I cannot emphasize enough how much this film floored me, and I am astonished that it isn't getting these proper dues in the day and age when people can access it more freely.



## 12. SANJURO

Naturally, any sequen to *Yojimbo* couldn't match how strong the former film is, but *Sanjuro* is a damn good followup that has its own merits. This film truly is a successor in the sense that we continue to follow the character of, well, Sanjuro (played again by Mifune) and get to see him kick more ass, just because we clearly didn't get enough of a taste of his powers the first go around. I don't view the film as essential regarding the narrative continuation of *Yojimbo*, but anyone wanting a classic Kurosawa samurai film needs to watch what is yet another example of the director being the best to ever make such a film (when even a "weaker" example is heads and shoulders above millions of films Kurosawa inspired).



## 11. STRAY DOG

Kurosawa's last film of the forties, *Stray Dog*, is an exceptional send off to the decade in anticipation of what was to come from the rising auteur. He would perfect the crime genre later on (more on that shortly), but *Stray Dog* was an early sign that he was the right visionary to take on such subject matters, with two cops trying to take on the same case with their different intentions and approaches. *Stray Dog* encourages audiences to get lost in the midst of the chase, and we do in this classic film noir that helped prove that there was still much to say in the early days of the genre's descent into obscurity (and before the neo-noir movement to come; something Kurosawa helped usher in).



## 10. KAGEMUSHA

Kurosawa said that he made *Kagemusha* — the start of his comeback — so that *Ran* could run, and you can easily see why from the vibrant, stage-like colours of the film (especially the dream sequences) to the epic scale and scope of the film. Of course, the film may forever live in *Ran*'s shadow, but that doesn't mean that it isn't amazing in its own right and deserved of its flowers (including Kurosawa's sole Palme d'Or at Cannes). To watch *Kagemusha* is to feel like you're experiencing a new mythology: a story that feels biblical and fairy-tale-like at once. It was the first sign since *Dersu Uzala* that Kurosawa felt like he was truly at the top of his craft again, and this time no amount of industry nonsense or bad luck in life will stop him from connecting with us once more. If *Kagemusha* was as good as he got during this renaissance, I'd still be grateful. However, as we know, it was only his second-best release during this period, and even then he was magnificent.



## 9. THE HIDDEN FORTRESS

Seeing as I cannot learn from the times, I have a hot take and somehow survive, I'm putting myself in front of the firing squad again. Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* is better than George Lucas' *Star Wars* (which is so closely linked to the former film that it's impossible to ignore). Yeah. I said it. While Lucas takes us to another galaxy far, far away, Kurosawa gets us wrapped up in the lore of old without nearly as much of the special effects wizardry. This hypnotism exists almost solely based on the prowess of storytelling gold. Once overlooked but now quite popular thanks to numerous factors (the internet, Criterion's release of the film, et cetera), *The Hidden Fortress* is rightfully being considered amongst Kurosawa's best in this day and age, which pleases me at least for one significant reason. It may be his most playfully fun action film that you cannot help but be whisked away by.



## 8. DRUNKEN ANGEL

The best film Kurosawa made in the forties is the yakuza noir classic, *Drunken Angel*. His first partnership of many with Mifune (one of the great actors of all



time), Kurosawa makes the most of the volcanic actor in this dismal, moody flick, to the point that the moral epicentre feels obscured by delirium. As tensions flare and nothing is what it seems, *Drunken Angel* introduces audiences to characters with bullet-fast frustration and reservation. I love how palpable these characters and settings are, as if we are reading all about them in a gripping novel and are hallucinating the images of a master wordsmith in our minds. Much of the film feels hazy as if they are recollections we are struggling to piece back together, and I love how Kurosawa implores us to keep searching for truth and meaning in *Drunken Angel*.



## 7. THRONE OF BLOOD

Kurosawa loved literature, and this fascination extended all the way to the works of William Shakespeare, whose works he adapted multiple times (including *The Bad Sleep Well*, which is a take on *Hamlet*, and *Ran*, based on *King Lear*). *Throne of Blood* is perhaps the greatest take on *Macbeth* (a frequently adapted film even before Kurosawa's version, but especially now) you may ever see. I cannot get enough of how much the film swirls around within its own insanity, as we are a part of the hysteria sparked by the characters at the forefront (and both their guilt and grievances). Even though the film never gets explicitly psychological, I always feel like I am within the mindset of ill people being weighed down by their own sins. *Throne of Blood* proves that Kurosawa didn't just understand Shakespeare, but he fully digested the timeless potential of his works: something he may have also desired (and clearly achieved).



## 6. YOJIMBO

One of my favourite stories in film history is how much Kurosawa inspired Western cinema (both in terms of Hollywood, and also the Western genre) and vice versa. The action epic, *Seven Samurai*, would be adapted into *The Magnificent Seven* in 1960. In the meantime, that year, Kurosawa was returning the favour with *Yojimbo*: his samurai answer to the lone ranger (or outlaw) found within the typically American genre. He turned the soft-and-silent-type hero into a mystifying bodyguard who bit far more than he barked. At this point, Westerns were becoming universal, and Kurosawa would once again have his work adapted into such a film, this time it was Sergio Leone's spaghetti Western, *A Fistful of Dollars* (even Kurosawa himself noticed the obvious similarities, and asked to be acknowledged by Leone with the Clint Eastwood-starring classic). On its own, *Yojimbo* is a fantastic answer to a culture, movement, and genre, enough so to the point of sparking another branch of all of the above.



## 5. HIGH AND LOW



Kurosawa is more known for his samurai films and period dramas, but he *needs* to be recognized as a master of the crime genre as well. If any of the previous films on this list didn't pique your interest already, here's exhibit A: *High and Low*. One of the great thrillers of the sixties, this unpredictable game of cat-and-mouse between a wealthy family in the midst of a kidnapped loved one and a poorer person wanting to be heard and helped is phenomenally twisty. Despite not being a Shakespeare adaptation like other Kurosawa films, this story feels almost Shakespearean in nature because of how much depth every character has and how effortlessly the plot unfurls (it is clever without ever feeling forced). *High and Low* is becoming a fan favourite for many in the day and age of the internet and streaming which I am grateful for, because it is rightfully being recognized as a pivotal look at classism, societal disparity, and how mystery thrillers can be made in film.



#### 4. RASHOMON

I would argue that two of Kurosawa's films are of the most influential variety in film history. The first of this pair is *Rashomon*, and it's clear to see why. The inventive solution to limited sets and actors is to retell the same story multiple times but from the perspectives of different characters. Not only do we have an exemplary display of exposition and unreliable narration via this technique, we also are left to our own devices as to who we believe after a tragedy takes place; this sparks audience involvement in ways that many directors have tried to replicate since (even down to outright copying the gimmick of *Rashomon*, which is appropriately now known as the *Rashomon* effect). It's difficult to pick just one best film that Kurosawa made, and it may pain many of you to see *Rashomon* not take first place (believe me, this is a five out of five, as are a number of Kurosawa films), but I can gladly give the film the trophy for the best screenplay and story in any Kurosawa film (it feels unparalleled by many films, even many of Kurosawa's own).



### 3. SEVEN SAMURAI

The second film I'd argue is one of the most influential of all time is *Seven Samurai*, which, again, is easy to see why. Outside of the numerous adaptations and films that have tried to replicate what this masterwork accomplishes, *Seven Samurai* is a reinvention of editing, pacing, action choreography, and massive storytelling (the film is nearly four hours and it feels much shorter, appealing to many cinephiles including those who typically detest long run times). Redefining what the cinematic epic could look like (especially because of how deeply rooted and visceral the film is, as it never loses sight of its characters or their motivations), *Seven Samurai* is most people's first Kurosawa film for good reason: it's the perfect entry point for newcomers to see how much of the industry changed thanks to the Japanese legend.



### 2. IKIRU

What does the end of your life look like? No one wants to prophesy their own demise and what is to come once we no longer have access to life and reality, but Kurosawa was figuring out how he'd want to go out by the time he released



*Ikiru*: the best film of his classic period. As we follow an ill bureaucrat who no longer wants to waste his time on Earth on trivialities, we see how society wants us to keep going just for its own advancement; there's no care for humanity there. Kurosawa calls for us to celebrate the very fact that we are alive while we can, even in our dying hours, and *Ikiru* is painfully gorgeous as a result. As if Kurosawa learned from *Rashomon*, the second act of *Ikiru* takes place after death, with surviving witnesses speaking on behalf of the fallen to keep his spirit going; life isn't just the one that we live, but it's how others rekindle our life through memory and legacy.



## 1. RAN

If *Ikiru* is the best film Kurosawa released during his prime, then *Ran* is easily the greatest work of his renaissance (maybe there was some truth to Kurosawa's belief that he was finally making the kinds of films he was born to make, seeing as *Ran* also happens to be his magnum opus, and one of the great films of all time). An exhilarating adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, this majestic, bombastic, gigantic film sports all of the colours of the ancient theatre, the gore of then-modern day cinema, and the relentlessness of a director who was tired of being pushed around by an industry and by life. Not one second of this film feels wasted or embellished. It's one thing to tip my hat to the story here (you can thank Shakespeare, but I think Kurosawa and company perfectly translated a play of yesteryear into a period epic that still feels progressive, never mind contemporary).

Then there's the other angle I would prefer to go: that this may be the best directed film of all time. The action choreography feels so meticulous, and yet it breathes like dancers partaking in a ballet number. The hyperbolic colours, makeup, and costumes feel feigned at first, but within minutes I am spellbound by a nearly surreal take on classic literature and a distant time. This film is pure artistry, all while having a hefty story to justify every single decision we see on screen. I cannot emphasize how much I adore *Ran*. I knew from the

instant I finished watching it the first time that I had fallen in love with motion pictures all over again, and each time I revisit it (even if I just *remember* it) I continue to have a closer bond with the medium. Watching *Ran* is to see a master at work, and I sincerely think that no one else on Earth could have made the film; you notice how there are many imitators of *Seven Samurai*, *Rashomon*, and other Kurosawa films and not this one? That's what I mean. *Ran* is flat-out an exemplary film I will never stop loving, and it is my favourite film by Akira Kurosawa.

**Visit these Web Links to view MORE of him:**

**[A] Recommends: Top 15 Akira Kurosawa Films**

<https://www.kerrychambersthelilypad.com/post/recommends-top-15-akira-kurosawa-films-thelilypad-kerrychambers>

**[B] Remakes of films by Akira Kurosawa**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remakes\\_of\\_films\\_by\\_Akira\\_Kurosawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remakes_of_films_by_Akira_Kurosawa)

**[C] List of works by Akira Kurosawa**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_works\\_by\\_Akira\\_Kurosawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_Akira_Kurosawa)

**[D] 10 Best Films of Akira Kurosawa**

<https://letterboxd.com/highonfilms/story/10-best-films-of-akira-kurosawa/>

**[E] Every Akira Kurosawa Movie, Ranked**

<https://www.pastemagazine.com/movies/akira-kurosawa/every-akira-kurosawa-movie-ranked>

**[F] All 30 Akira Kurosawa Movies Ranked from Worst to Best**

<https://www.tasteofcinema.com/2020/all-30-akira-kurosawa-movies-ranked-from-worst-to-best/>

<https://akirakurosawa.info/books-on-akira-kurosawa-movies/>

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## Contents:

- Akira Kurosawa (Peter Wild)
- All the Emperor's Men: Kurosawa's Pearl Harbor (Hiroshi Tasogawa)
- Compound Cinematics: Akira Kurosawa and I (Shinobu Hashimoto)
- The Emperor and the Wolf (Stuart Galbraith IV)
- Something Like an Autobiography (Akira Kurosawa)
- Waiting on the Weather: Making Movies with Akira Kurosawa (Teruyo Nogami)

- Akira Kurosawa: A Viewer's Guide (Eric San Juan)
- Akira Kurosawa And Modern Japan (David A. Conrad)
- The Films of Akira Kurosawa (Donald Richie)
- Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema (Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto)
- The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa (Stephen Prince)

- Akira Kurosawa: Interviews (ed. Bert Cardullo)



- [Perspectives on Akira Kurosawa](#) (ed. James Goodwin)
- [Post Script: The Films of Kurosawa Akira](#) (ed. Keiko McDonald)
- [Rashomon](#) (ed. Donald Richie)
- [Rashomon Effects](#) (ed. Davis, Anderson & Walls)

#### **Books With a Specific Focus**

- [Akira Kurosawa and Intertextual Cinema](#) (James Goodwin)
- [Censorship of Japanese Films...](#) (Lars-Martin Sorensen)
- [Everything I Know About Filmmaking...](#) (Richard D. Pepperman)
- [On Kurosawa: A Tribute to the Master Director](#) (Peter Tasker)
- [Remaking Kurosawa: Translations and Permutations in Global Cinema](#) (D. P. Martinez)
- [Rhapsody on a Film by Akira Kurosawa](#) (Leonard Ginsberg)
- [The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa](#) (David Desser)
- [Samurai Lear?](#) (Karl Gorringer)
- [Seven Samurai](#) (Joan Mellen)
- [Seven Samurai](#) (Roy Stafford)

#### **Art Books**

- [Akira Kurosawa: Complete Drawings](#) (Akira Kurosawa)
- [Akira Kurosawa: Dessins](#) (Akira Kurosawa)
- [Akira Kurosawa: Kadokawa Art Selection](#) (Akira Kurosawa)
- [Akira Kurosawa: Master of Cinema](#) (Peter Cowie)
- [Kurosawa: Desenler \(Drawings\)](#) (Akira Kurosawa)
- [Ran: Original Screenplay & Storyboards](#) (Akira Kurosawa)
- [Yume](#) (Akira Kurosawa)

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